

OBITUARY

Edward Frank Hancock (1921-2001)

Edward (“Ted”) Hancock, was born on 6 November 1921 in Gillingham, Kent and died from a stroke on 1 February, 2001, aged 79. Earlier attacks curtailed his mobility, but had not affected communication with a network of entomologists. This correspondence had built up over several years and was mainly specific to the tortricoid moths following his acceptance of the task of producing the species descriptions and maps of this group for what is to be volume 5 of the series *Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland* (MBGBI Harley Books). In this role he became one of the band of mainly amateur naturalists responsible for much of this monumental work, following a long-standing British tradition.



Ted’s career was as an industrial chemist working for Glaxo Laboratories Ltd. After leaving school and attending Medway Technical College, he was apprenticed to Boots Chemists from 1938 – 1941. At the end of this time, bombing of Chatham dockyards was at its height and when not rolling pills during the day Ted spent nights on fire-watch duty on the roof of the shop to cope with incendiaries. The front of the shop was severely damaged when a bomb fell in the street on one of these nights, but he escaped personal injury. Final qualification as a pharmacist took place in 1944 with a degree from the Pharmaceutical Society in Bloomsbury, London and in doing so one bronze and two silver medals were awarded, although the receipt of these and the associated ceremony was not held until after the war because of metal shortages.

After qualifying, he joined a research team set up at the University of London to investigate ways of producing penicillin on a larger scale than the level of the petri dish in which Sir Alexander Fleming had first seen it. It was essential for the war effort to be able to treat infection in soldiers and get them back to the front line. It was discovered that the drug could be re-crystallised from certain solvent solutions, but only after the team moved to Cardiff University away from London where bombs and doodlebugs constantly interfered with the flow of experimentation. In this work the team collaborated with American research groups also working on the same project. An agreement had been made between the two governments to share the technology whoever "won" and under this memorandum it did not become patented as a British invention. The romantic notion of being able to save the lives of wounded soldiers was somewhat tarnished by later discovering that priority use for the first batches was to those suffering venereal disease contracted while on leave in Rome! Apparently, this was judged by the War Office to be more efficient in getting otherwise fit soldiers back into the ranks more quickly than those who were physically injured on active duty. Mass production quickly allowed larger quantities to be available for more serious infections.

Ted's career moved from academia to industry, joining Glaxo in 1946, and moving to Barnard Castle, where he met Joyce Bell, a Hexhamshire lass, already on the staff at that factory, marrying in 1947. A move to Ulverston, where a new factory was being built to manufacture penicillin and other antibiotics, was to be permanent. A son was born in 1948, Edward Geoffrey, who was eventually to become a professional entomologist, a career which Ted frequently asserted he would rather have pursued. The English Lake District proved too attractive to accept any offers of promotion that might have meant moving away. Studying natural history as a hobby developed, initially expressed in photographing flowers with an early single lens reflex camera. From about 1963 an interest in insects arose. This meant starting a collection and a library, joining societies and making contact with others locally, nationally and eventually internationally. Other local entomologists were gradually encountered, on one occasion meeting Dr Neville Birkett for the first time while searching for the Duke of Burgundy Fritillary at one of its local strongholds between Ulverston and Kendal. Dr Birkett has made a valuable contribution to the writing of this obituary.

A crucial early milestone can be identified in meeting professionally with John Heath, then working for the Merlewood Station of the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology at Grange-over-Sands. Merlewood needed some laboratory glassware for one of their annual open-day demonstrations and Heath went to Ulverston to negotiate a loan from Glaxo Laboratories. He encouraged the Hancocks, father and son, to adopt scientific procedures in studying insects in both the field and the study, emphasising the proper preservation of specimens, accurate labelling, the use of biological

nomenclature, visiting certain habitat types for recording for conservation purposes, etc. Consequently, many evenings were spent poring over books and specimens. Days at local reserves and nights with his newly invented portable UV light (soon to be marketed and sold as the Heath Trap) rapidly filled field notebooks. One of his prototype traps made up in his garage at Grange-over-Sands still functions occasionally in Scotland and presumably is well on the way to becoming a potential museum piece in itself.

D. W. ("Bill") Kydd, a Glaxo colleague, became Ted's constant entomological field companion around Cumbrian sites. Initially they were targeted by John Heath at surveying the local low-lying north Lancashire mosses at Rusland, Angerton, Ellerside, Meathop, Holker, etc., and the famous Roudsea Wood National Nature Reserve. Their common interest was often pursued at lunchtimes on the old slag heaps adjacent to the factory. In earlier times, the site had been one of the local iron works, exploiting the haematite deposits in Furness which were becoming exhausted by the late 1930s. The rich, basic slag provided an interesting area to hunt for plants and insects. The heaps have been re-worked and graded recently and are not as productive.

The Heath and Hancock family friendship continued after John H. moved south to Monks Wood to run the Lepidoptera Mapping Scheme. The ambitious project of producing *MBGBI* evolved and the eventual outcome was that Ted was commissioned to convert the species descriptions in the text of the excellent Ray Society volumes on tortricoid moths into the standardised format used by *MBGBI*. There were also a few gaps in life histories and the maps needed to be created. Ted went about the task with vigour, networking with other moth enthusiasts throughout Britain to fill gaps and sort out some nomenclatural confusions. Genitalia preparations were essential for identifying worn specimens sent in from light traps up and down the country and pursuing names for these revealed a number of mistakes of transposition, transcription, etc., in the existing literature. A total in excess of 700 permanent microscope slides are part of the collection. The most basic Amstrad word processor was purchased and became the workhorse for generating not only the text itself but lists, reports and all other forms of communication via printed paper. A most productive correspondence was initiated with Josef Razowski. This Polish expert on the group was extremely generous with reprints and books and the best way to reciprocate was for small but crucial spare parts for Razowski's aged Volvo car to be mailed into the then still communist country.

It is a pity that the *MBGBI* tortricoid volume has not appeared in his own time, but in due course it will act as a part-memorial to his life. It still requires ancillary contributions, the plates to be drawn and genitalia figures for every species, which last task is being fulfilled by Josef Razowski. Ted's collection of Lepidoptera (of all families) has been donated to the Hunterian Museum (Zoology) at the University of Glasgow and, as a memorial, family and

friends have contributed towards the purchase of additional standard drawers for housing it there. Some lists and manuscript notes on local distribution have been deposited in the Tullie House Museum, Carlisle. The correspondence (which occupied a considerable bulk) has been accepted by the Natural History Museum, London, as an archive. In years to come it may perhaps be seen as representative on a small scale of the enormous effort by amateur lepidopterists of the late twentieth century in both providing seminal texts and the development and use of mapping for habitat and species conservation. Ted's wife Joyce died of cancer shortly after his first stroke, which left him housebound from 1991. Geoffrey and his family, Elizabeth, Barbara and Louisa now live near Glasgow, where Ted spent the last three years in a nursing home but most memories will be of holidays with nets in hands when the sun always seemed to be shining.

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E.G. Hancock